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**Seen But Not Heard:
An embodied account of the (student) actor's aesthetic labour**

Abstract:

Within the commercial performance industry, the actor's body often acts as a product with a certain exchange value. The lived experience of this is an aspect of the acting profession that is undeniable, perhaps inevitable, and yet remains relatively unexplored in discussions of actor training. Through case study research in five UK Drama schools this article examines the dynamics of physical capital and self-exploitation which can play a part in student actors' relationship with their body and their strategies of appearance-management. I argue that the actor's submission to aesthetic labour processes, and what has been described as their 'acceptance and expectation of discrimination' on the basis of their physicality, are predicated on a deeply embedded and embodied conceptualization of the Body as Servant which can be found in training as well as the profession. In my discussion I draw upon findings in the field of cognitive science, thus aiming to give an account of the actor's aesthetic labour which avoids the problematic mind-body split that can be seen to limit existing aesthetic labour literature.

Introduction

Within the social sciences, the body as involved in forms of exchange has been examined extensively. Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 2002) places the body at the heart of his theory of social reproduction, using the term 'embodied capital' to acknowledge the body's central role in the acquisition of cultural and social capital (2002: 282).

Chris Shilling (2003) develops Bourdieu's work further by introducing the term 'physical capital' to describe the way in which the body in itself is assigned value within the terms of exchange in contemporary society:

When social fields bestow value directly on a specific bodily form, activity or performance, they are effectively creating a category of physical capital. (2003: 121)

The use of physical capital through the maintenance of appearance as an aspect of work has been the subject of numerous analyses of labour practice that focus on 'aesthetic labour' (Witz et al., 2003). In relation to interactive service work, Warhurst et al. (2000) define aesthetic labour as

a supply of 'embodied capacities and attributes' possessed by workers at the point of entry into employment. Employers then mobilise, develop and commodify these capacities and attributes through processes of recruitment, selection and training, transforming them into 'competencies' or 'skills' which are then aesthetically geared towards producing a 'style' of service encounter. (Warhurst et al., 2000: 4)

Although much of this literature centres on the interactive service industries and their organizational structures, the concept of aesthetic labour has also been applied more widely to include accounts of freelance employment in professions such as modelling (Entwhistle and Wissinger, 2006), and acting (Dean, 2005; 2008).¹ In relation to actors working in the commercial performance industry, Deborah Dean's

¹ Aesthetic labour within the service industries has been examined in relation to 'the use of aesthetic labour to promote products and services by organizations, and the way in which workers' bodies are harnessed to sell the organization's image, literally by embodying it' (Entwhistle and Wissinger, 2006: 775). In freelance work meanwhile, rather than being guided by clear organizational styles and codes, 'workers have to commodify *themselves* under fluctuating conditions' (Entwhistle and Wissinger, 2006: 776)

account of women performers in particular provides an important perspective on the actor's appearance as a form of exchange, by emphasizing that performers show an 'acceptance and expectation of discrimination' in their profession (2005: 771).

Conversations with actors in training echo this observation: 'No matter how good you are technically... it doesn't equate to future employment. The reality is that if you fit the bill aesthetically, you'll be fine. Develop a thick skin now! (Male 2nd year student, School T). While for Dean this suggests that aesthetic labour is 'necessarily framed by shared, if contested, constructions of social positions', I will argue in the following that such an 'acceptance and expectation of discrimination' is also rooted in a deeply embedded and embodied understanding of the Body as Servant to art, business and self (Dean, 2006: 771).

Paradoxically, although the principle of aesthetic labour is to 'recuperate the embodied character' of work (Witz et al., 2003: 35), it seems that existing efforts to do so remain trapped in a distinction between inner and outer, and thus lack the opportunity for a fully embodied account. Developed in response to Arlie Hochschild's (1983) concept of 'emotional labour', the initial notion of aesthetic labour has been critiqued for merely shifting the attention from 'deep' emotion to 'surface' appearance (Entwhistle and Wissinger, 2006: 776). Entwhistle and Wissinger's work goes some way in broadening the 'reductive' account of aesthetic labour in previous literature by suggesting that it should not supplant, but rather be seen as an extension of, notions of emotional labour: 'the effort required to keep up appearances is very much emotional and feelingful *as well as* physical and aesthetic' (2006: 786, emphasis in original). Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty they propose a 'more resolutely embodied account' which would see 'self and body as indivisible' (784). Despite this, their discussion remains caught in the binary between inner and

outer, describing the body as a 'vehicle for the self', and 'mind, or consciousness' as located within the body (784-785).

In order to develop the understanding of the actor's aesthetic labour as embodied, I thus refer to research in the cognitive sciences by Park et al (2011; 2012), based on established principles from Barnard's (1985) *Interacting Cognitive Subsystems* which suggest that we understand and conceptualize through the simultaneous interactions of the body — including the neural structures of the brain — and the environment.² Examining the notion of the Body as Servant through this lens will illuminate the ways in which it affects student actors' craft and wellbeing, and maintains existing power dynamics within the actor's aesthetic labour. It shows that the concept of the body as a commodity that is 'at service' pervades the student actors' experience, and, although often concerned with image and appearance, affects the students in a way that is far from superficial.

This paper is based on case study research conducted over two and a half years. It involved 32 students (15 female and 17 male) and ten teachers (six female, three male) on undergraduate Acting courses at five UK Drama schools, as well as 44 professional actors (29 female, 15 male) trained and based in the UK. Student participants were aged between 18 and 28, while professional actors covered a wide age spectrum between the ages of 22 and 75. Selection of participants was random — dependent on availability, willingness to engage with the topic, and the institutions' concession to allow the researcher access.

² Antonio Damasio (2000) also offers important perspectives on this process in his discussion of consciousness, unconscious processes, and the role of feelings and emotions in making bodily states conscious. He summarizes that 'Feeling an emotion... consists of having mental images arising from the neural patterns which represent the changes in body and brain that make up an emotion... Proto-self precedes basic feeling and both precede the feeling of knowing that constitutes core consciousness' (280-281). Damasio also offers distinctions between this 'proto-self' and the notion of the 'homunculus creature who is in charge of knowing' (2000: 11).

The research was comprised of formal interviews with 24 students, ten teachers, and nine professional actors, while the remaining participants completed an online survey. It also draws upon over 60 hours of observation at two participating institutions, including movement, acting and voice lessons and professional preparation seminars. Access to an internal survey (Survey A), taken by one drama school independently from this research and questioning three cohorts of second-year acting students, provides additional information. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, all individuals and institutions referred to in relation to the fieldwork have been anonymised. It should however be noted that the participating institutions are all members of Drama UK, the accrediting body for vocational performing arts courses in the UK which has 20 member schools.³

The responsibility of aesthetic labour in acting

I feel by not making the changes that would be possible (losing weight, getting a blepharoplasty, being better groomed) I am being irresponsible. I know what the business requires and it's up to me to make myself as castable as possible. (Female professional actor, aged 55)

As the statement of the actor above reminds us, what an actor looks like matters. Typecasting, beauty ideals, fashions of the body, and the perception of what kind of body is appropriate to perform a specific role — all of these contribute to the importance of the actor's appearance in gaining work, particularly in the commercial performance industry. Here a physical capital marketplace has developed, in which the dynamics of supply and demand are shaped by the number of actors with a

³ Drama UK was created in 2012 as a merger of the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS) and the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT): 'Drama UK member schools represent the highest standards of training within the vocational drama sector. The 20 member schools provide courses that include Acting, Musical Theatre, Directing, Design and all aspects of Technical Theatre. Graduates are currently working on stage, in front of the camera and behind the scenes in theatre, film and radio in Britain, Europe and worldwide' (Drama UK website, 2012).

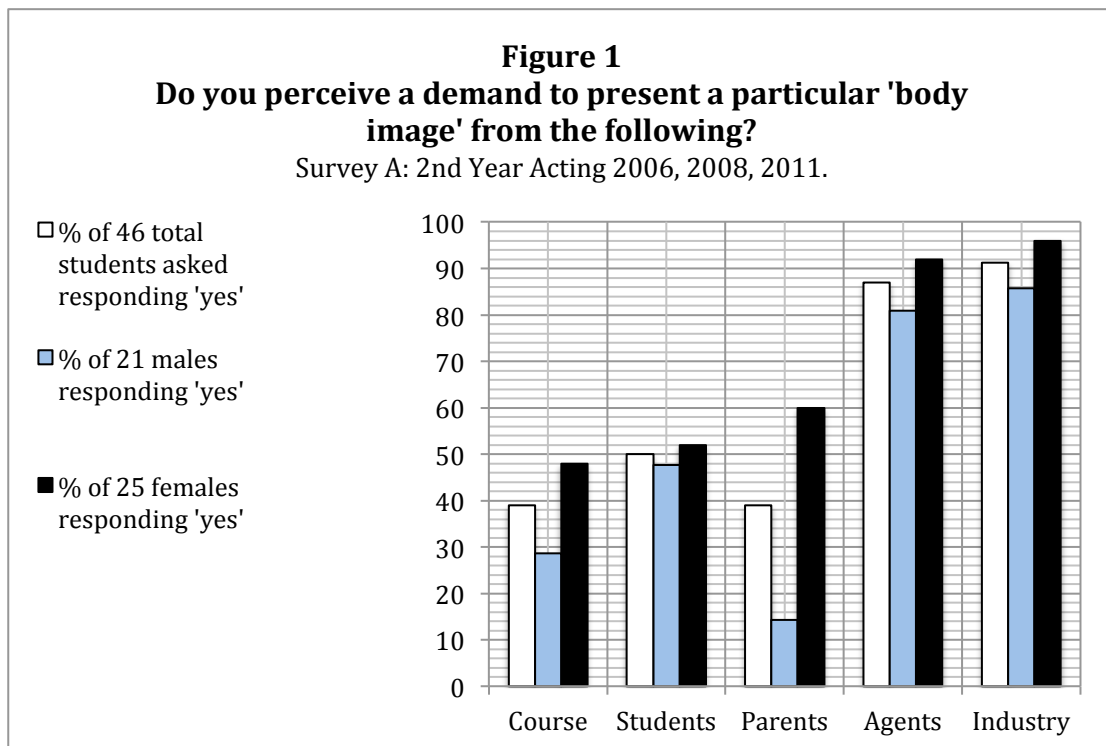
certain physicality seeking work at one time, and by assumptions of what type of body is deemed appropriate to perform a certain role or character.⁴ Questioned as to whether the industry causes her concern about how she looks, one student for example states that ‘my personal worry is that as a classical looking middle class white girl, I worry that I fall into a very, very large category’ (Female 3rd year student, School X). Within this marketplace actors must be able to ‘mobilise, develop and commodify’ those ‘embodied capacities and attributes’ which they believe are in greatest demand (Warhurst et al., 2000: 4).⁵

It is thus perhaps unsurprising that actors begin to consider their strategies of appearance-management even whilst still within their training. Responses to Survey A show that a significant number of students in one institution perceive a demand to present a particular ‘body image’ [See Figure 1].⁶

⁴ Whilst always significantly active in film and television, in theatre and with the decline of repertory companies the development of this marketplace has arguably been aided by the now predominant system of typecasting, as a process of hiring actors for each individual project (Vance, 2005; Pao, 2010).

⁵ The types of body in demand, and the narratives which they are permitted to represent, are heavily influenced by existing social stereotypes and sociocultural conceptions of the body. As Witz et al. (2003) emphasize, ‘The kinds of embodied dispositions that acquire an exchange value are not equally distributed socially, but fractured by class, gender, age and racialized positions or locations’ (2003: 41).

⁶ The definition of the term body image in this survey is unclear, but appears to refer to the presentation of a certain ‘type’ by creating a correlating image through the appearance — the external image — of the body.



Here, the largest amount of students experienced this demand from industry (91.3%) and agents (87%), indicating their awareness that aesthetic labour will form a part of their profession. However, 39% of respondents stated that they also felt this demand from their course, and, equally, 39% experienced it from their parents.⁷ Further, expectations from fellow students were experienced by 50% of the students, emphasizing the element of competition between peers:

I feel when you are on a course with girls who are a lot slimmer than you, and that's whom you'll be compared with in year three, you need to take responsibility for what you look like... I don't want to be turned down for something over my weight (Female 2nd year student, Survey A).

The pressure to present and cultivate a certain type of physicality thus appears in a variety of contexts for the student, correlating with Entwistle's argument that

⁷ The expectations perceived from parents may be linked with increasing public-awareness campaigns regarding obesity in children and young people, and the accompanying media narratives laying moral responsibility on parents, as in the example of Stoppards' article 'Child obesity: Are the parents to blame?' (2012). The moral implications of certain bodies and the signifiers they present for certain social and cultural activities reiterates Bourdieu's and Shilling's discussions of the body as a form of capital.

'aesthetic labour doesn't just happen *at work*... but endures beyond the working day' (2006: 777). The endurance 'beyond the working day' not only refers to the fact that actors feel their physicality to be judged in a variety of social situations, but also to the fact that their aesthetic labour often requires maintenance through ongoing embodied practices.

The perceptions described in Survey A are also reflected in the narratives of students in other institutions. As noted by Dean, the value assigned to specific physical signifiers is affected by the performer's gender, age, ethnicity and ability (2005). Despite this, it appears that many students perceive a relatively narrow general definition of the physical type that can bring them commercial success, most often using the descriptors 'slim', 'sexy', 'toned', 'characterful' and 'individual'. These descriptors highlight students' awareness that they will be required to develop an image that is rare and thus has a high market value, whilst at the same time satisfying general trends for the type of body that is in fashion. Certain types of physicality are thus clearly associated with certain types of success:

If I think about toning up, there will always be the industry man in the back of my head saying yeah that's probably a good idea. I do feel pressure to look good, there is a certain casting and I want to maintain that look. (3rd year male student, School X)

Considering the body as 'hardware' in the employment exchange, and thus as part of professional responsibility (Witz et al, 2003: 43), is a core aspect of aesthetic labour, but is nuanced for the actor. In the interviews and surveys carried out for this research, three main attitudes of responsibility emerge through which actors appear to rationalize the way in which they treat their body. These are found in the actors' narration of their body and self in relation to cultural expectations, stereotypes, and understandings of art and business:

- I. Responsibility to art:

Defining and shaping their professional body in relation to cultural expectations/casting types is seen as an inevitable part of the actors' job, if it is integral to the performance. Here it is agreed that this is necessary in order for the actor to be able to serve the performance text, while it is maintained that changes of the body should however not be at the mercy of fashion or whim:

If you do not look like the character the audience will find it more difficult to relate to you as the character. (2nd year female student, School T)

I am willing to change up to a certain point if it seems reasonable and necessary for the creative aspect of the part but not if it is a fancy or a fashion. It has to find some kind of justification for me in order to be willing to alter my body. (Female prof. actor, aged 32)

2. Responsibility to business:

Defining and shaping the professional body in relation to cultural expectations/casting types is seen as an inevitable part of the job in the way the industry currently operates. This is not something the actor necessarily agrees with, but is seen as something that must be submitted to in order to work:

There is too much focus on specific types of people. I feel you can be attractive and curvy or any other body shape but many jobs ask specifically for "model type" for a female role and "everyman" for the male. There seems to be the idea that only exquisitely beautiful females are interesting but people will identify more with the average Joe. [Appearance] is, however, an important part of the job. You need to be able to fulfil a casting directors image of the character and if they see them as "beautiful" (which is very subjective) there isn't much you can do to convince them otherwise. (Female prof. actor, aged 32)

It is the BUSINESS itself that is becoming more focused on looks... Actors are merely trying to keep up with the changing business in order to get work... and if that means working on your appearance, so be it. (Female prof. actor, aged 26)

Someone of my size (6 ft 2 and 14.7 stone) needs to maintain a physical consistency and athleticism. One agent told me I should be "as big as possible". (3rd year male student, School T)

3. Responsibility to self:

Defining and living the professional body in relation to cultural expectations/casting types is seen as secondary to the sense of self developed through an awareness of skills and attributes as actors and human beings.

Even my mum and dad would say to me now 'oh, you know you don't want to limit yourself by being the size and shape you are'... But I think it comes out of a concern because they understand the industry to be

like that... I say to them now, that there's no point in me trying to be five foot five and blonde because that isn't what I look like and that isn't what I act like and that isn't what I am like in my personality, so there's no point in my trying to match that image if that wouldn't be what I was anyway. I may as well make the most of what I am. (Female prof. actor, aged 22)

If they don't want me for who I am, they can go find someone else... If a casting director has chosen me to play a part, but they want me to alter something, the casting director has clearly not done a very good job. I would only go as far as changing my hair. (3rd year male student, School T)

It is important to note that the three 'attitudes' described above often seem to overlap or co-exist, and one may give way to another as a consequence of lived circumstances. Particularly in relation to art and business, they reiterate Dean's observation that many actors show an 'acceptance and expectation of discrimination' (2005: 771). The way in which this acceptance — and its consequences for the actor's relationship with their body — are managed by actors is, I argue, rooted in a notion of the Body as Servant to the task of fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

Recognizing the processes of the Body as Servant

The concept of Body as Servant can be related to the more general assumption that an actor should 'serve': the narrative, the public, the director, the text. In language it is illustrated by the use of phrases such as 'the show must go on', implying that the actor's physical and emotional wellbeing is to be sacrificed and put to the service of the performance events and their stakeholders — including the audience. It also emerges through phrases such as 'No Pain, No Gain', which is aptly the headline to one online article that discusses the physical transformations undertaken by well-known actors for specific film roles (Acuna, K., 2012). Implicit within this phrase is a

perception that endurance of painful experiences will be rewarded with ‘gain’ — the body at the service of the specific aim the actor has set themselves:

I am the kind of actor who diets ridiculously, goes through binge diets of ‘I’m going to not’, you know, ‘I’m going to cut major food groups out of my diet’. In order to achieve something... Equally, I’m also the kind of actor who [will] go to the place of transforming my body to the extreme by putting on weight to play a part. (Male prof. actor, aged 30)

The narrative of ‘no pain, no gain’ emphasizes the blurring and overlapping of the actor’s attitudes of responsibility. If the ‘gain’ which the actor is aiming towards is a greater sense of satisfaction in fulfilling the demands of art and business, a sense of fulfilling responsibility towards the self is also achieved by gaining this satisfaction:

‘Contemporary emphasis on individuality and self-actualization through work sees power operating through the requirement to be an “enterprising individual”

(Entwhistle and Wissinger, 2006: 782). The ‘pain’ which must be endured in the process can then be perceived as a necessary means to an end, self-actualization becoming ‘folded into systems of discipline and accumulation’ (Hesmondalgh & Baker, 2011: 77).

In the context of actor training, these narratives are sometimes explicitly articulated by students, but are also implicit in visible changes in students’ embodied practices. Those students who experience their bodies as a product within a marketplace may consider changes to their physical appearance, with the purpose of transforming it into the type of ‘product’ in demand within their desired field of employment. For the most part it is the female students who are reported to diminish in size through diets, while male students are more likely to embark on intensive fitness regimes with the aim of building muscle:

Sometimes you can’t stop the boys being down the gym. Which can quite often be counter productive... The girls go on crash diets, is what they do. Just before they come in for the showcase. Again, I am generalizing. It’s not everybody. But it is noticeable. When they do showcase in front

of an agent, practically everyone will go on a diet. And try and get in shape. (Tutor in professional practice, School T)

The transformations in question here are not those achieved through the craft of acting, but transformations of the actors' physical attributes through 'technologies of the body' (Heyes, 2007, p. 26).⁸ These might range from changes in hair-style and -colour or use of make-up through to more intrusive practices, such as diets that induce weight-loss or weight-gain, fitness regimes to build muscle which may be accompanied by protein-shakes or steroids, plastic surgery, Botox injections, skin-whitening or tanning, and re-shaping of the teeth.⁹

From the perspective of teachers, the 'technologies of the body' that are described here are commonly seen as detrimental to the actor's training experience. They are associated with what Cressida Heyes (2007) terms 'aspectal captivity', in which an individual is held captive by one specific, often culturally idealized, image which they are trying to embody (2007: 18). This is perceived to potentially detract from the students' ability to explore their range of transformation through the craft of acting. One Movement teacher thus emphasizes that students need to stay connected to

the other aspect of them as an actor, which is the transforming one. And at all points, if they close that door, in other words if they muscle build and they become set in stone, this particular thing, then they've just thrown away a whole massive aspect of their acting. (Movement tutor, School A, 2012).

⁸ Cressida Heyes, drawing upon Foucault, argues that 'technologies of the body' are employed in an effort to 'mitigate the psychological exhaustion of social dys-appearance' that may occur if a body is perceived to not fulfill the expectations of an individual's social field (2007: 26).

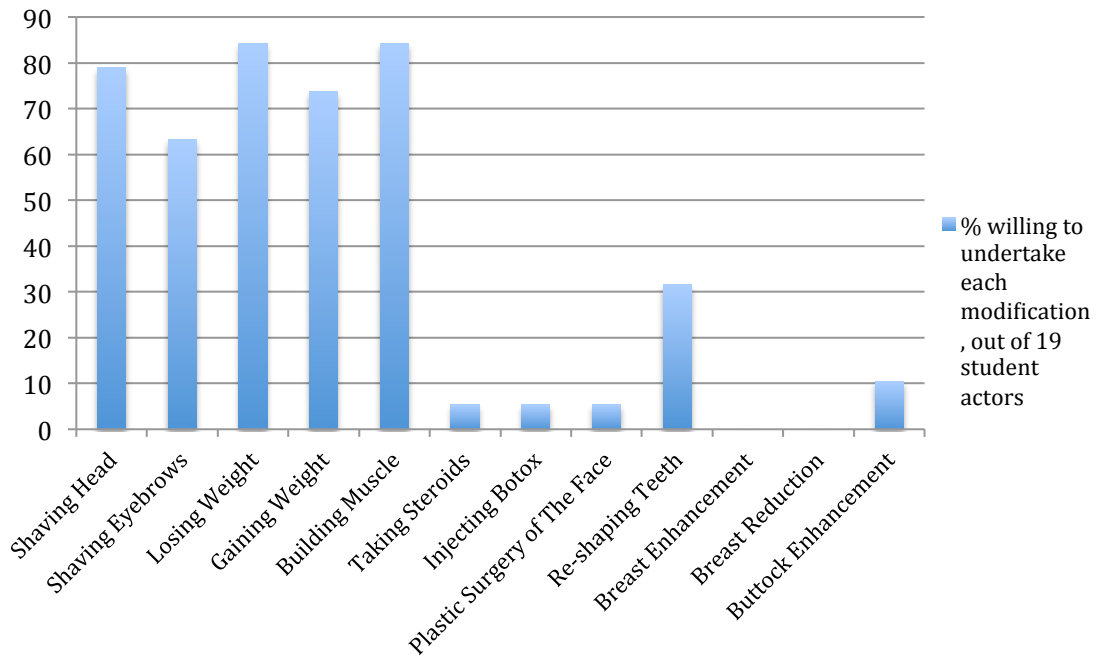
⁹ It should be noted that some of the apparently more harmless practices — such as those relating to hair style, facial hair or make-up — can in fact be experienced as just as intrusive for the actor's sense of self as for example a weight-loss regime. An actor's response quoted by Dean (2005) illustrates this: 'I will always smarten up. Because when God made woman he decreed that she must wear lots of make-up... I find it vexing, an intense and perpetual irritation, that I do sometimes feel I have to put myself across in a particular way' (Performer in Dean, 2005: 768).

Despite advice to the contrary however, teachers report that such embodied practices continue to be employed amongst students. As one Head of Acting notes:

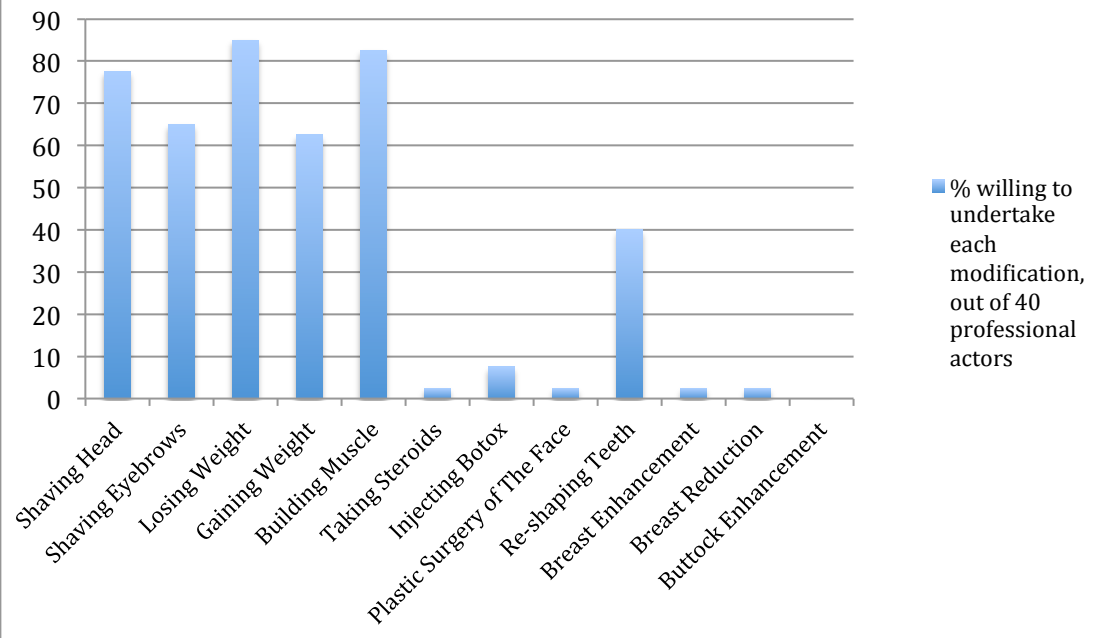
Students don't talk about their bodies [in class]. Students do things to their bodies. Students observe employed bodies, and register consciously and subconsciously what an employed body looks like. And orientate their own physical trajectory to that point I think. (Head of Acting, School A)

The degree to which this is the case is illustrated by students' and professional actors' response to the question of how far they would go, on the list below, in transforming their bodies for a dream job [See Figure 2a&b].

**Figure 1a: How far would you go for a (dream) job?
Student Actors**



**Figure 1b: How far would you go for a (dream) job?
Professional Actors**



Responses show close similarities between students' and professional actors' willingness to make certain changes to their physicality. Both groups are particularly willing to undertake those 'technologies' which are seen as reversible, such as weight-loss or –gain. Whilst their reversibility can in fact be debated, what is certain is that they entail a disciplined and enduring practice of physical maintenance which demands the body to be seen as servant.¹⁰

Understanding how the 'Body as Servant' operates as a central aspect of the student actor's aesthetic labour can be clarified by examining the embodied nature of cognitive processes relating to the body 'at service'. I do so by referring to the work of Park, Dunn and Barnard (2011; 2012) on the processes of attention in eating disorders, specifically anorexia nervosa. This work is based on Philip Barnard's (1985) established model of 'Interactive Cognitive Subsystems', which suggests that the reciprocal interaction of two levels of meaning is central to conscious cognition:

Within this framework, the workings of the mind depend on the dynamics of information flow between subsystems, involving the transformation of codes between one subsystem and another... The propositional subsystem stores explicit, conceptual, intellectual meanings, such as instructions in a manual or streams of verbalized thoughts, whereas the implicational subsystem stores abstract, generic, emotional meanings (Park et al., 2011: 417).

Both the coding of 'explicit, conceptual' and of 'abstract, emotional' meanings described here are additionally shaped by verbal inputs and mental images, and 'multi-modal sensory inputs' from body state in the interaction with the surrounding world (2011: 418):

Patterns of implicational code, representing generic, holistic meanings, are organized as *schematic models of self*. The implicational schematic models

¹⁰ Bacon and Aphramor (2011) state that a weight-focused paradigm is 'damaging, contributing to food and body preoccupation, repeated cycles of weight loss and regain, distraction from other personal health goals and wider health determinants, reduced self-esteem, eating disorders, other health decrement, and weight stigmatization and discrimination' (2011: 1).

encode multimodal information from a wide range of sources, including body-state and sensory inputs. (2011: 417)

This implies that we understand and conceptualize through the simultaneous interactions of the environment and the body— including the neural structures of the brain. Rational thought about who we are — such as an understanding of the Body as Servant — has then always already arisen from the body’s interaction with the world and, importantly, affects the whole interactive system in further embodied conceptualizations.

Based on this principle, Park et al then focus on the paradoxical concern about, and disregard of, the body in the anorexic condition — two contrasting relationships to the body which we can also recognize in many of the actors’ narratives of their body:

When I was on the gym and dance routine, I had a strict diet and was running from one class to the next, or trying to fit a gym session in, because I was afraid my body would change if I didn't stick to my regime. I was also eating very unhealthy, having very little food, which caused me to feel faint during menstrual cycles or not having any at all. However I felt more confident in going to meet casting directors or doing screen tests, because I knew I don't have to worry I look too fat on screen for the part. (Female prof. actor, aged 27, 2012)

They propose that these can be explained by examining where attention is placed, suggesting that the anorexic condition fluctuates between two extreme states of attention, or modes. One of these is the ‘doing’ mode, which is ‘dominated by conceptualizing, discrepancy-based processing and reduced awareness of emotions and body-state’ (2011: 431). The second is the ‘mindless bodily emoting mode’, which the individual shifts to when the rituals and structures of the ‘doing’ mode are challenged, and which is ‘characterized by feeling out of control and overwhelmed by aversive emotions and bodily sensations’ (2011: 431).¹¹

¹¹ When considering each mode, it is important to remember that all the other processes of the Interactive Cognitive Subsystem are still taking place, but that the individual is not paying

While this model is specifically designed in relation to anorexia nervosa, its analysis of the processes through which body anxiety is experienced and managed may, I suggest, also be usefully applied to less extreme cases of body anxiety related to the actor's aesthetic labour. The description of the 'doing mode' can be related to the conceptualization of the Body as Servant, echoing the actors' articulation of their responsibility to serve, and the consequent willingness to disregard pain or discomfort to fulfil this responsibility. The careful management of the body in the workplace over time requires 'a disciplining of the emotions and drives in order to experience such self-control as desirable, proper and pleasurable' (Shilling, 2010b: 159), a process that becomes most explicit in the fieldwork through stories of food restriction and rigorous body-shaping regimes. I suggest that actors' narratives of body-management then take on similar forms as those described by Park et al. in the 'doing' mode:

The body is experienced as an object to be tightly controlled and the individual exerts powerful cognitive and behavioural strategies over eating, weight and shape. This is a self-reinforcing and potentially rewarding state, associated with senses of personal meaning, structure, safety, and specialness. (2011: 431)

In anorexia, this doing mode is de-stabilized by anything which interrupts behavioural strategies, or habits, thus breaking the individual's sense of control and throwing them into the 'mindless bodily emoting' mode. The resulting overwhelming 'hyper-awareness' of the body is in turn avoided by returning to the structure and safety of even more strict strategies of control, looping back into the 'doing' mode (2012: 88). The process thus forms a self-enforcing cycle which describes the increasingly firm embedding of habits in the individual's cognitive and physical processes.

attention to them. In the 'doing' mode, for example, 'despite the fact that awareness is not directed to the body, this system still communicates with the implicational subsystem all of the time' (Park et al., 2011: 430).

By drawing on this research I am not suggesting that all actors who experience body anxiety are anorexic. I do however believe that there are close correlations between this explanation of the anorexic condition and less drastic pre-occupations with physical appearance. For the actor, this would have a number of implications. Firstly, if we recognize the similarities between the ‘doing’ mode and the notion of the Body as Servant, this not only illustrates the threat the concept poses to the actor’s wellbeing, but also the detrimental effects it may have on their professional capacities. Park et al’s research offers compelling evidence that the consequences of the ‘doing’ mode may increase the individual’s reluctance to move beyond their habitual structures. It encourages certain habits to become deeply entrenched, while eroding the important skills of listening and responding with and through the body which are so important to the actor’s craft — and to an embodied sense of self.¹² Secondly, the embodied conceptualization of Body as Servant helps to maintain existing power dynamics within the actor’s aesthetic labour. By providing the actor with a temporary experience of control, it veils the lack of agency which is implied in the actor’s ‘acceptance and expectation of discrimination’ (Dean, 2005: 771).

The Body as Servant within the Drama School

The fieldwork for this research involving students actors frequently reveals attitudes connected to the notion of the Body as Servant, indicating that it is one of the crucial factors through which students understand their body in relation to art, business and self. In some respects this may seem paradoxical, as particularly the body-focused aspects of actor training — such as movement or voice classes — aim

¹² Anne Dennis defines these skill as the basis of the actor’s craft, noting that the actor must be responsive to both internal and external influences, ‘to reflect through his physicality all that is happening inside: to make the invisible visible’ (Dennis, 1995: 19).

to facilitate the kind of mindful practice which Park et al (2012) suggest can break the compulsive return to the 'doing' mode. The emphasis on being-in-the-moment through Jacques Lecoq's (2002) Neutral Mask training, or the careful processes of attentive listening to the body in the practice of Moshé Fedenkrais (1980), are just two examples which are commonly present in the drama school curriculum. They enact what Park et al propose to be effective intervention strategies into the patterns of body anxiety, by working with 'the quality of attention to body state to shift the mode of mind in which the body is experienced' and making use of 'routine-breaking and mental imagery strategies... executed while attending to sensory and bodily aspects of experience' (Park et al., 2012: 92).

However, despite encountering a possible antidote to the 'doing' mode within their curriculum, student actors still frequently develop the notion of Body as Servant. In part this may be related to sociocultural factors, such as the prevailing ethics of working on the self in which a 'good' body is deemed to be the reflection of a 'good' person (Shilling, 2010b):

Our body is judged as our individual production. We can fashion it... [and] whatever the means, our body is our calling card, vested with showing the results of our hard work and watchfulness or, alternatively, our failure and sloth... Our bodies are and have become a form of work. The body is turning from being the means of production to the production itself (Orbach, 2009: 5).¹³

In part it may also be related to the continuing pressure of the physical capital market students will enter, increased by narratives of actors whose success is celebrated alongside their dedication to drastic physical transformation and discipline.¹⁴

¹³ Within this, what is 'good' is subject to the judgment of fashion, potential for profit, and political view, and must be constantly assessed by the actor as part of their aesthetic labour. As Entwistle and Wissinger note, 'Capitalism constantly innovates ways of extracting value and, by implication, working bodies have to constantly adapt if they are to keep pace with the market conditions under which they sell their labour' (2006: 780).

¹⁴ The British actor Rafe Spall for example describes how a regime of diets, exercise and change of hairstyle allowed his progression from an actor who is 'a bit poriky, not much of a

Alongside these contextual factors, I suggest that the prevailing notion of Body as Servant and the strategies it entails also relate to the way in which aesthetic labour is framed and engaged with by the training institution. When it comes to discussions of how a recognition that the body is a form of capital affects students' sense of self, reflective discourse seems rarely to take place in the teaching space. It is either kept to one-on-one 'surgery' situations and treated as a matter of pastoral care, or engaged with in terms of the actor's preparation for the market of the performance industry.

It is unlikely that students would question this, although they recognize benefits when such discussions do occur: 'I am very glad that someone at [this school] cares about these issues, since they are never addressed within the acting course. Thank you' (Female 2nd year student, Survey A). Indeed, all participating students state that they would not articulate concerns about their appearance in the classroom, despite the fact that they see it as an important aspect of their profession. This can be linked to an understanding that a student's responsibility to serve often extends to include the 'brand' of their training institution. Having gained access to a high-ranking drama school, they are described as 'already winners', as it is 'twice as hard to get into a leading drama school as it is to get into Oxbridge, with the ratio of applicants to places averaging seven to one' (Gardner, 2008). For students, becoming part of an institution which is lauded in this way may present a compelling argument against questioning training practices or structures within the school, thus instating an unequal relationship of power between the school and its students.¹⁵

looker' and who is typecast 'invariably as the fat boy, the joker, the smartarse', to a 'svelte, smart' romantic lead in the romantic comedy *I Give It A Year* (Hattenstone, 2013).

¹⁵ Evans (2009) notes that in his research into movement training students 'seldom seemed to express any sense of their power being abused' and that they felt they were encouraged to 'focus on developing their own ownership of a process rather than blind

In light of this it seems likely that if topics such as the negotiation of the actor's anxiety around body, identity and appearance are trivialized, marginalized, or excluded from the training, this may generate a sense among students that to raise these issues shows a lack of strength, or a reluctance to commit to the necessary discipline required by their profession. As a consequence, the 'doing' mode which actor training seeks to avoid may be re-energized precisely by silencing the questions around aesthetic labour which feed it.

Conclusion

This paper explores some of the aspects of aesthetic labour in the acting profession, and the way in which they extend into the context of actor training.

It does not present itself as a general account of the actor's aesthetic labour, as this is a topic which encompasses many more facets and nuances than can be considered here. Some of these have been examined in previous literature, such as the impact of the sexualisation of young women on their engagement with actor training (Alexandrowicz, 2012), the gendered and racialized aesthetic labour of professional actors (Dean, 2005; 2008), and the 'disciplined' and 'unruly' body in British movement training for actors (Evans, 2009).

However, I suggest that the specific aspect of aesthetic labour which I examine here — the embodied conceptualization of the Body as Servant — plays an important part in any consideration of the actor's appearance-management. I have aimed to illustrate that the actors' aesthetic labour, although ostensibly concerned with surface appearance, affects the actor in a deeply embodied manner. Drawing upon Park et al.

loyalty to a system' (2009: 135). However, he also notes that 'loyalty to the school' remains a central aspect to pedagogy in movement classes (134).

to examine the narratives of research participants emphasizes that a re-shaping of the body inevitably involves a re-shaping of the cognitive processes. By developing embodied concepts such as the Body as Servant, actors may internalize their responsibility toward art and business and associate it with a sense of 'personal meaning, structure, safety, and specialness' (2011: 431), while potentially eroding an awareness of the body that is a valuable tool in their profession. The concept thus acts as a powerful disciplining mechanism within the actors' aesthetic labour, and as a strategy of replacing the sense of agency denied to them through the physical capital marketplace of their profession.

Further, I propose that aesthetic labour takes place within actor training in very similar ways as it does in the profession, but that the way in which this impacts on student actors' sense of self is rarely considered as part of the curriculum. Students' learning in this area could thus be considered to take place through what Henry Giroux (1983) calls the 'hidden curriculum': 'those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life' (1983: 47). The anxieties within aesthetic labour that cause students to make use of 'technologies of the body' thus present an aspect of actor training that requires more attention and consideration than it has received in the past. Actor training institutions might invest further in exploring and providing bridging strategies between training practices and the demands of aesthetic labour. Such bridging could allow students to make use of their skills in mindful practice when encountering body anxiety in the face of the industry and the culture of the body in which it is embedded.

Over the course of this research, I have worked with a number of institutions which are beginning to recognize a responsibility to provide space for discussions

where these 'hidden' — and ironically most visible — aspects of the profession are engaged with in a way that 'acknowledges the dialectical interplay of social interest, political power, and economic power on the one hand, and school knowledge and practices on the other' (Giroux, 1983: 44). However, much work remains to be done for schools to fully integrate a topic which is both highly emotionally charged and, by its very nature, lends itself to being discarded as superficial.

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